

Developing New Teams

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“Developing New Teams - A look at the systems that we are adopting as a new team on the Lincoln University Dairy Farm. What works for our team? What needs further refinement and improvements planned for the future? How do we try to achieve an efficient team environment? What are the challenges when developing a new team, and how have we approached these?”

This paper outlines the process taken in the development of the team on the Lincoln University Dairy Farm for the first season, some of the systems that we have established and some of the refinements that we will be looking to introduce during the next season. Our definition of a team is: “Two or more people working towards a common goal or objective for which they hold themselves mutually accountable. They work together to complete a task more effectively and successfully than the individuals in the team would do if they were working separately.”

The processes taken in developing the new team on the Lincoln University Dairy Farm.

Define the goals and objectives for the dairy farm

We need to have a clear understanding of the dairy farm’s goals and objectives, before we can start to define individual goals and objectives, as they all need to link into the overall expectations for the farm business.

This was established in the early planning stages for the Lincoln University Dairy Farm(LUDF) and involved the short term, medium and long-term goals and objectives for the farm. Further development has been progressing during the current year on a formal business plan for the complete dairy farm business. This covers in detail specific goals and objectives for the farm, operation targets and details of the dairy farm systems.

Define the person specification and job description for each team member

Develop a person specification that meets the requirements of the individual roles for all the team members. This includes a job description for each team member incorporating the accountability, functional relationships, key tasks and performance standards. This is because it is one of the tools used to identify the best candidate for the role when selecting team members.

This person profile needs to be regularly up-dated as team roles change as the dairy farm business grows, or as the goals and objectives change in the future. This refinement will assist in development of skills within the farm team to meet changing requirements.

Examples of some these specifications are:

Person specification

- Good record keeping and communication skills. Able to maintain accurate retrievable stock records and to communicate effectively with other farm staff.

Functional relationships

The appointee will work in a co-operative and collaborative way with the following:

- Lincoln University academic staff, especially those within the Animal and Food Sciences Division, the Applied Management and Computing Division, and the Soil, Plant and Ecological Sciences Division.

Key tasks

- To report regularly to the dairy farm manager on stock health, pasture quantity, pasture quality, farm maintenance and such other matters that contribute to effective farm management.

General terms and conditions

- One of the goals of the dairy farm is to meet the market in relation to the terms and conditions of employment for the staff employed, but not to lead the market in any one direction. For this reason the salary ranges are maintained in the “normal / average” range for the individual staff positions and level of responsibility.
- We aim to give the staff reasonable time off during the season (weekends), three weeks annual leave not including statutory holidays, with some flexibility when they can have this leave. The farm manager manages the annual leave and time off in lieu for statutory holidays worked in consultation with all the team members.
- A taxable accommodation allowance is paid to team members as part of the total package, and they in turn rent accommodation in the market or from the university at market rates.
- A clothing allowance is paid to team members, and they supply they own work clothing from this allowance. This does not include any health and safety equipment required by the nature of the work being undertaken.
- Farm bikes are provided and maintained by the dairy farm.

Selecting the people who are capable and compatible to match the specifications

In establishing a completely new team, it is a challenge to find people to fill the whole team from scratch. We had four new team members start on the dairy farm, including one

person who had worked on the old Lincoln University dairy farm, who had not worked together before and, being new, the team dynamics were not developed. One of the original four left in November to pursue other opportunities, and a new team member started with us in January. This staff turnover in our first year hopefully will not be the case in future years. The aim is:

- Staff to perform to expectations or better
- Retain staff for an average of 2 ½ years, and a minimum of one year
- Develop staff skills to enable them to progress within the dairy farm or in dairy industry.

The selection process involved an interview, referee and reference checks and an opportunity for the applicants to ask questions about their roles in the dairy farm, and any other details that they required.

A survey of points that attracted current staff to the Lincoln University Dairy Farm is listed below (not in any specific order):

- Proximity to Christchurch city.
- Contact and involvement in research.
- Being a part of Lincoln University.
- Education opportunities through the university.
- Remuneration and conditions.
- Industry exposure, involvement in field-days.
- Training and skill development.
- Team environment and team approach to goals and objectives.
- Rosters and weekends off - All staff agreed that weekend time off was most preferred.

Define the operational goals and objectives to be achieved and the tasks to be performed

All team members need to be working towards achieving the operational goals and objectives for the farm. It is a key aspect that all team members have first a good understanding of the farm's goals and objectives, then to understand what their role and responsibility in achieving these.

We assist staff members to be a full and active team member in the dairy farm by:

- Setting clear goals and objectives for the farm.
- Listing their contribution and participation in achieving these goals and objectives.
- Assigning responsibility with training support and backup, keeping in mind the existing skill base and potential.
- Encouraging a level of pride in their area of responsibility.
- Encouraging team members to develop new skills, and to work towards their own

individual goals and objectives.

Time management and rosters

This season we developed a system of recording days worked and length of day worked, statutory holidays worked and time off which is taken. This assists me, as manager, to ensure we give equivalent days off for statutory holidays worked, manage annual leave and give time off during the winter months for longer days worked in the spring. This record of work during the season, will help ensure fair time off for all team members and recognise their individual contribution to the farm operation.

Management of the working roster requires thought about day-to-day aspects of the job, the health and welfare of the staff and the retention of people in the dairy industry. We have trialled a number of different rosters this season, and have decided that a combination of these is what we will endeavour to use next season. I don't want to imply that this is what everyone should be doing, because every system has to be appropriate for the individual farming operation.

The farm manager and the assistant farm manager plan the milking roster. The cost of the relief milkers needs to be allocated in the budget and approved. The relief milkers are equivalent to approx $\frac{1}{4}$ of a "full time equivalent" (fte). All team members are able to contribute to and access the information in the roster.

Proposed staff roster for next year (to be finalised)

Winter - Dry

Jun / $\frac{1}{2}$ Jul

- Weekends - one worked, three off
- Two day weekend i.e.: 12:2:5:2:5:2 split
- 8.30 am - 4.30 pm
- Annual leave planned for this period

Spring - Calving $\frac{1}{2}$ Jul / Aug, Sep

- Weekends - one worked, one off
- Two day weekend i.e.: 12:2 split
- 5.00 am - 6.00 pm (longer if required)
- 1x casual milker for weekend work

Mating Period Oct / Nov / $\frac{1}{4}$ Dec

- Weekends 11 days worked, three days off
- Three day weekend i.e.: 11:3 split - full day feeding, irrigation if required etc
- 5.00 am - 5.00 pm
- 1x casual milker for weekend work

Summer - Irrigation $\frac{3}{4}$ Dec Jan Feb

- Weekends - one worked, three off
- Two day weekend i.e.: 12:2:5:2:5:2 split - full day irrigation, feeding etc
- 5.00 am - 5.00 pm

- Annual leave planned for this period
- 1x casual milker for weekend work

Autumn Mar, Apr May

- Weekends: one worked, thee off
- Two day weekend i.e.: 12:2:5:2:5:2 split - full day irrigation, feeding etc
- 5.00 am - 5.00 pm
- 1x casual milker for weekend work

The staffing requirements for farm vary throughout the season and a general guideline is listed below:

Spring - Minimum of two staff required for milking, three staff required when introducing colostrum cows to the milking routine. All staff assist with dry and springing cow management, and all play a role with calf rearing.

Mating - Three staff members are required to operate the dairy during the morning milking to identify and remove cows for AI mating.

Summer and autumn - Two staff members are required to operate the dairy during this period. This requirement is assuming that we are not involved with a split herd situation and, should this be necessary, then some increased input may be required for stock collection. We have run up to six herds in spring, including milking cows, colostrum cows, sick or mastitis cows, springing cows, dry cows and dry heifers. During the mating season we have milking cows, sick or mastitis cows, and cows to be mated. For the rest of the season we have had milking cows and sick or mastitis cows. In the future we may well be running a split herd operation.

Develop a team identity (common goals)

Creating a team Identity

A goal of the dairy farm is to ensure all team members feel that they form a valuable part of the total team, fully contribute in the operation of the farm and its goals and objectives. This means team members are able to attend and participate in the field days that are run during the year. Also we endeavour to keep all staff informed about the farm operation and performance and how we are going relative to budget. This involves a weekly meeting where we discuss the tasks for the week ahead and how the targets for the farm are progressing. The meeting is structured in a semi formal style, with all staff able and encouraged to participate in discussions and offer suggestions. We aim for a flat management structure so that all team members can approach anyone in the management team and that all team members, including the farm business manager, can be involved in team meetings.

Team building

We determine some milestones for the farm throughout the season, and aim to do something as a team to celebrate milestones when they are achieved, including time specific events. We determine milestones with the entire team members' input to ensure all are part of achieving the milestones. Some possibilities include the completion of calving and completion of mating, completion of lactation as time specific milestones. Team performance milestones include ½ budget production before x date, budget production achieved, irrigation maintains field capacity within recommended range and, the maintenance of high milk quality standards. These are suggestions at this time for events and we will determine these together as a team.

Work together on the required tasks: Evaluate the performance of the team together, and investigate ways to improve

Performance reviews

The performance review is an important tool to help both the team members and the management of the dairy farm achieve the goals set. We conduct the reviews two to three times a year, with each team member able to self score their performance and then the team manager can discuss their performance assessment. This is an excellent opportunity to encourage thought and discussion about future training and career development for team members. We work through the job description and the list key goals and objectives for each role. We aim to make the performance review non-confrontational but challenging. This process also includes performance improvements required and a time frame for these to be achieved. I encourage team members to contribute suggestions on improvements that they feel could be applied to the whole farm operation.

Management style

Team development involves input from all team members. The role for me as the farm manager is to encourage and facilitate communication within the team. With a range of ages in a team this is extremely important and takes time. I need to motivate the team members and also demonstrate self-motivation in my role. An understanding of a team member's aspirations and goals and their involvement and contribution while in the LUDF team, is critical to developing the team environment. I try to understand why the individual members want to work for the LUDF, and then assist them to achieve this goal. This involves working on a career development plan for each team member while at the LUDF, and how the farm will contribute and participate in this plan.

The assistant team manager's role is to communicate with the team members, contribute to team meetings and offer suggestions when possible. He has an input to all aspects of the operation on the LUDF.

Regularly evaluate the goals and objectives for both the farm and the team, and the systems in place to achieve the required result

Weekly team meetings

This is a time for general discussion and input from all team members. We are constantly working towards improving this forum, and developing a structure where all can contribute. The topics for discussion include the points below, and any other topics that may be placed on the agenda.

Weekly goals for:	Production	Team members
	Livestock	Financial
	Property maintenance	Milking roster

We discuss daily objectives, tasks and deadlines for the week ahead, and any medium to long-term deadlines that need to be actioned for the future. General discussion is encouraged and the forum is open for all to contribute and offer suggestions about tasks and improvements

Job satisfaction and career paths

I feel that the best way to retain good staff is to aim for the highest level of job satisfaction for team members. If individual team members do not enjoy their job most of the time, they will lose interest in their contribution to the Lincoln University Dairy Farm, and in the dairy industry in general. Everybody goes through “flat” periods in his or her employment, and it is my role to help team members through these times, and assist them to re-focus and motivate themselves towards their personal goals, and the farm goals and objectives. Part of this is assisting the team members to develop a career path for themselves, and to determine how the Lincoln University Dairy Farm can contribute to this career path. This could include outside training as well as internal training in skill areas identified that they need to develop. Examples include pasture assessment and feed budgeting through to farm management and computer skills. The aim is for team members to be able to take “the next step up” when they leave. The management team focus is on the person not on the “worker as a labour unit.”

Conclusions

The process taken in developing the new team on the Lincoln University can be summarised with the key points listed below:

- Define the goals and objectives for the dairy.
- Define the person specification and job description for each team member.
- Select people who are capable and compatible to match the specifications.
- Define the operational goals and objectives to be achieved and the tasks to be

performed.

- Develop a team identity.
- Work together on the required tasks. Evaluate the performance of the team together, and investigate ways to improve.
- Regularly evaluate the goals and objectives for both the farm and the team, and the systems in place to achieve the required result.

Workshop summary

Presentation summary

- Define the goals and objectives for the farm.
- Define the person specification and job description for each team member.
 - This becomes the basis of the performance review process
- Select people who are compatible and capable to match the specifications.
 - Understand why they want to work for you.
 - Understand where they are trying to get to.
- Define the operational goals and objectives to be achieved and the tasks to be performed.
- Develop a team identity. Rely on each other, help each other, celebrate success.
- Work together on the required tasks (farm and organisational). Evaluate the performance of the team together, and investigate ways to improve.
- Do regular performance reviews of all team members to identify areas of development.
- Regularly evaluate the goals and objectives for both the farm and the team, and the systems in place to achieve the required result.

Questions and discussion

Terms and conditions, job description.

- Aim for 50 - 55 hrs/wk average. 5 am start - 5 pm finish, one hour breakfast and lunch.
- Pay market rates. Provide farm bikes. Salary package (accommodation allowance included).
- Annual three weeks to be taken sometime in summer, autumn, or winter. Hours recorded.
- All safety gear provided and must be used.
- Aim for stable team on the farm with some turnover. Range of ages, each upskilling.

Rosters

- To meet all team needs and farm needs. Includes rostered sleepins.
- Weekends off. Approximately 30 - 35 weekends off / year.
- Different rosters for winter, calving, mating, summer, autumn.
- Use of a relief milker each weekend with one staff member.
- Changed to the rosters referred to above because people got too worn out on previous plan.
- Use Fridays to minimise the work on the weekend. Brett rostered on weekends also.

Other

- Contractors used for cultivating, silage, fencing, drainage.
- Each person is responsible to do set tasks, or organise another to do them
- Weekly meeting essential. Used to plan week, evaluate last week's performance, anyone can put things on the agenda. Open to others involved in farm. Address issues early.
- Performance evaluation essential. Three time per year on a one-to-one basis.

Non confrontational. Specific to job description on measurable things.

- Develop individual training and development plan.
- Pressure Fonterra to meet staff needs on farms with pick up times as well as it own needs.
- Have a flat structure. People rostered on call to help in weekends if needed.

Summary

Brett said he'd done his job if he'd "trained other staff to do his job," people enjoyed working on the Lincoln Dairy Farm, and the farm goals had been met.